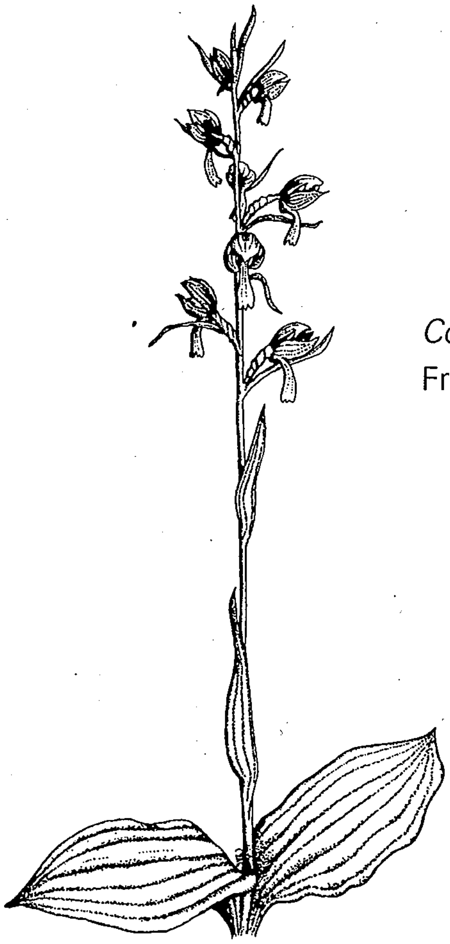
Shropshire Flora Group

Newsletter

Spring 1997



Coeloglossum viride
Frog orchid

The mysterious disappearing Frog Orchid
Abutilon theophrasti Medikus - new to VC40
Training courses & field trips in 1997
The conservation of roadsides

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The Leighton Committee of the Shropshire Wildlife Trust
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Shropshire Flora Group Newsletter

Spring 1997

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Text & illustrations © Sarah Whild 1997

(Except illustration on p.4 from *Flowers of the Field*, by Rev C.A.Johns. ca. 1861)

Data & maps from Recorder *Shropshire Flora* and DMap for Windows v 5.3p

News

Sarah Whild

Our Christmas meeting at Preston Montford Field Centre was well attended, with some 30 people turning up to hear Chris Preston of the Environmental Information Centre at Monks Wood talk about the changing aquatic flora of Britain. It was a most interesting talk, with news on the latest aliens to be found in waterbodies, details of current research about how aquatic plants spread, and a fascinating perspective on the historical trends that have affected this country.

Before the meeting, Chris also took the time to visit Shrewsbury Museum's herbarium, where there are collections by eminent botanists from William Leighton to Charles Sinker. We were delighted to have the country's top pondweed expert to verify this collection, and it is worth mentioning that he did find a few corrections to be made. Our thanks to Peter Boyd for giving up his time on the weekend for this.

We are infinitely grateful to Chris for the entertainment and education, and to Sue Townsend and the crew at Preston Montford for providing the meeting facilities, including a log fire and a most excellent chocolate cake.

I would also like to thank all the Flora Group members who turned up, especially those clutching sets of completed record cards. Of note was Dr Hughes, who returned his first set of M cards, which included records for every tetrad in his square. I confess that I have still not surveyed the whole of my square (SJ51), which I have been recording in for 5 years or more.

There was a discussion about this newsletter and the way forward for the Flora Group. The dilemma is that the group is in a good position to expand - lots of people want to join and learn more about botany, but our resources remain static. The solution has to be that we start charging for membership, which is a shame, but it has to be. What we are going to do is operate a two-tier system, whereby recorders get their membership "free" in return for their contribution in recording for us, while new members and people from conservation organisations can subscribe to the Flora Group if they want to, but they don't necessarily have to do any recording. I shall give people the choice about whether they wish to subscribe or record.

Members were very supportive of the principle of a newsletter, and there appears to be general agreement that it is worthwhile. As there currently aren't any general publications on natural history in Shropshire, we can go some way towards filling this gap with our newsletter. The sort of topic we can cover varies enormously, and we can follow in the footsteps of the *Transactions* of Caradoc & Severn Valley Field Club, the Shropshire Conservation Trust's *Bulletin* and the *Shropshire Naturalist* in providing information of local interest. I would welcome contributions of articles and papers which might be of interest.

Records

An interesting find last autumn was ***Abutilon theophrasti***, Velvetleaf, at a couple of locations in south Shropshire. An unidentified plant was reported to be growing in some abundance in a farm near Bitterley (SO57), and Ian Trueman visited in September to have a look. Coincidentally, Mary Fuller had been shown a strange plant on a gravel heap near Craven Arms Station (SO48), and sent me a specimen. We were speculating as to which of these should be the first county record - Ian identified it first, but Mary's was already on the way. In the end it didn't matter, because Marjorie Wainwright has sent a record dating from 1991 for this species at Crickheath near Oswestry (SJ22). It was found by a Mr J Davies and identified by Peter Benoit.

Rob Stokes found ***Chenopodium ficifolium***, fig-leaved goosefoot, on a roadside verge near Newport (SJ71) in October. This is only the second confirmed record of this species, the first being just last year (1995), when Julie Clarke and Audrey Franks spotted it growing on a reseeded verge of the A525 near Woore (SJ74). Several older records were treated with some scepticism by Charles Sinker in the *Ecological Flora*; and include Shrewsbury (SJ41), Bostock (SJ71), and SO47. Although it is native in Britain, fig-leaved goosefoot is restricted to the south and east, and is described by Stace as only casual in the rest of the country. It is, perhaps, worth looking out for in arable fields and roadsides this summer. The lower leaves are quite distinctive, being three-lobed, with the middle lobe much longer than the other two - but not all that much like a fig leaf in shape... Voucher specimens would be much appreciated.

A third record of interest which came in late last year is for Greater Burnet-saxifrage *Pimpinella major*, which Pat Parker found growing along a canal side nearWhixall Moss (SJ43). This is the first such record since 1958.

Field Trips

Sarah Whild

With the demands of the forthcoming BSBI Atlas 2000, the number of field trips we are running this year is less than previously. We are, however, planning to spend many days in the field recording the wilder parts of the county, so if you feel the urge for a bit of tetrad bashing on Monday evenings, please give me a ring. The following short list of organised visits are intended to encourage a bit of exploration of some interesting sites and to help people hone their identification skills in amiable company. Please come along, but do call first to confirm, especially if you have not been to previous ones. My number is 01743 343789 or 0585 700368 (mobile).

Flora Group field trips in 1997

Date	Subject / site	Arrangements	Leader
Saturday May 3rd	Whitcliffe Wood	Meet in the lay-by at Whitcliffe Common (SO504743) at 11am.	Sarah Whild
Sunday June 1st	Dudmaston Woods	Meet at the car park at Highley-Alveley Country Park (SO754843)	Sarah Whild
Saturday July 26th	Identification of sedges. Meeting at Brown Moss at 11am and travelling to Llynclys during the day.		Ian Trueman
Thursday August 7th	Shropshire Union Canal	Meet at 11am at the junction of the A528 and A495, where the road crosses the canal. SJ412340	Pat Parker
Sunday September 28th	Ellesmere Mere	Meet at 11am at Cremorne Gardens, Ellesmere.	Sarah Whild & Ian Trueman

Surveying

With a number of new members to the Flora Group, it is probably timely to repeat a few words on surveying. Members might not all be aware that we are currently working towards a new Atlas of the British Flora, and we need to ensure that all parts of the county are adequately recorded within the next couple of years. Although the *Atlas* only requires records to be localised to the hectad level (the 10km squares marked on Ordnance Survey maps) we prefer to make all records as precise as possible, ideally using 1km squares or smaller units.

The system we use of having a co-ordinator for each hectad is sometimes a bit misleading. It does not mean that you can only record in that particular square. If people do stick to particular squares we tend to end up with distribution maps in which plants seem to grow in straight lines. It is far better, especially for the less experienced recorders, to do a bit of recording in many different parts of the county. I can provide recording cards to use in any "site" which, so long as it is within a clearly defined area, is the best way to record. When you send your records to me I return them to the relevant co-ordinator to confirm any rarities and incorporate the records into their species lists.

If you would like me to send you recording cards or you would like to discuss collecting records in more detail, please give me a call.

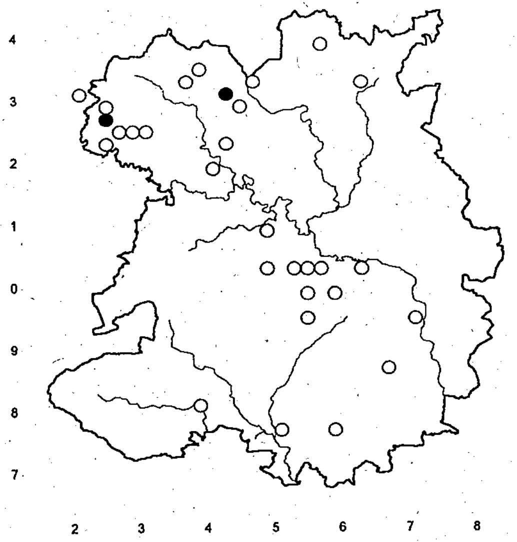
Sarah Whild

Brown Moss Update

Alex Lockton

Following our notes on Brown Moss in the last Newsletter, a quite remarkable species list has come to light. Specimens were collected there between 1846 and 1849 by the Rev. Holland Sandford, and these were given by his niece to James Cosmo Melvill, the county recorder, in 1912. What became of the herbarium, we do not know, but much of Melvill's collection of 500,000 specimens (including some by Darwin and Linnaeus) was eventually left to Manchester University. Sandford's list, although short, is very interesting:-

- ☐ *Anagallis tenella.* Bog pimpernel.
- ☐ *Hottonia palustris.* Water violet.
- ☐ *Lycopodiella inundata.* Marsh Clubmoss.
- ☐ *Parnassia palustris.* Grass of Parnassus.



Above: distribution map of *Pamassia palustris*, one of the many rare and declining plants that are, or were, found at Brown Moss. This species is now on the edge of extinction in Shropshire. Black dots show current sites.

Of these, only Water Violet and Bog Pimpernel are still found. Grass of Parnassus is a rather surprising plant to find there, because it favours a more base-rich soil than would be expected. It must be remembered, however, that the soil chemistry there is unusual, and some of the pools are quite base-rich. Perhaps local factors produced suitable conditions for this plant to flourish: there are old gravel workings, for example, which could have been quite calcareous. Grass of Parnassus was highlighted by Leighton (1841) and Sinker (1984) as having declined significantly, and it is now known from only two sites in the county.

If *Parnassia* is an uncommon plant to find, *Lycopodiella inundata* is even more special. This is the only record ever made for this species in Shropshire - a species which is now nationally scarce, being found in just 64 hectads in Britain (Stewart 1994). Marsh Clubmoss grows in bare peaty areas of mires, heaths, lake margins and sand and clay pits, mostly in the lowlands. It was once fairly widespread, but is now restricted to just a few scattered locations throughout England, Wales & Scotland. Drainage is responsible for much of the loss, but at Brown Moss it may well have responded well to disturbance from peat cutting, gravel extraction and grazing. Although it seems extraordinary, there is no reason to doubt this record, which was supported by a voucher specimen seen by Melvill, who was a first rate botanist; and from a site which must have been ideal for this species. It would be useful, though, to track down the voucher specimen as additional proof of the validity of this record, especially as Sinker appears to have rejected it in favour of *Lycopodium clavatum* in the *Ecological Flora.*

In the last edition of this newsletter I stated that the first exploration of Brown Moss was in 1955. This turns out to be quite untrue because, apart from Holland's records, there is another species list, dating from 1907 This was supplied by a Mr J. Ramsbottom, about whom we know nothing at all. He recorded Bog Pimpernel *Anagallis tenella*, Lesser Water-plantain *Baldellia ranunculoides,* Water Avens *Geum rivale*, Slender St. John's-wort *Hypericum pulchrum*, Corn Mint *Mentha arvensis* and Skullcap *Scutellaria galericulata.* Although it is quite a short list, it is a useful contribution to our understanding of the ecology of the moss. It seems likely that there is yet another list to be found, because Charles Sinker gives a dot in the *Flora* for Bog Myrtle *Myrica gale* in this tetrad. This apparently originates with the manuscript flora prepared by W.P.Hamilton in 1913.

In addition to the exploration of the history of Brown Moss, there is some action to secure its future. The debate about whether or not to cut down the trees in continuing apace. The case for conservation was apparently put forward quite succinctly by a senior officer at the County Council, who remarked that Brown Moss was "not an internationally important dog walking site". In contrast, it _*is*_ a County Wildlife Site, a Site of Special Scientific Interest, a Nature Conservation Review Site, part of a Ramsar wetland site of international importance and a Nature Reserve. Quite what is needed in order to take wildlife seriously is a bit of a mystery. It seems that both English Nature and the Environment Agency have offered to pay for the restoration of the moss, but that Shropshire County Council are still wavering in the face of stiff opposition by locals to the cutting down of any trees.

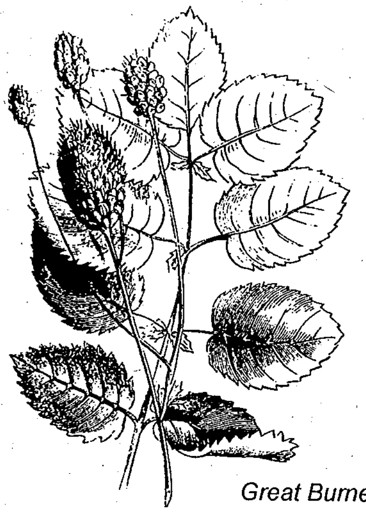
Sanguisorba officinalis Grasslands

Alex Lockton & Sarah Whild

One of the more interesting finds in the last few years was Great Burnet *Sanguisorba officinalis* in the grounds of a factory in Hortonwood, Telford. This is a species which is very much on the edge of its range in the county, and which is associated with a type of hay meadow that occurs in the flood plain of rivers in the Midlands. It is known as *Alopecurus pratensis - Sanguisorba officinalis* grassland (Rodwell 1992) and is one of the more uncommon vegetation communities that you might find in Shropshire. Among the species that occurs in this habitat - and nowhere else - is the Snake's-head *Fritillaria meleagris*, one of the most popular wild flowers.

The importance of identifying vegetation communities is that many species can only be conserved if you can protect their habitat. Each vegetation community is indicative not just of the species present, but also of the management regime, which ensures that conditions are right for the survival of the species that are typical of that habitat.

For example, *Sanguisorba officinalis* flood meadows are traditionally "shut up" for hay during the spring and not grazed until Lammas Day. This has the effect of allowing annual plants to set seed before the sward is cut or grazed but, in the autumn, when stock are allowed into the fields, their hoofs trample the turf and create "regeneration niches" where seedlings can establish themselves for the following year. So it is invaluable for conservation purposes to know the right management for a site in order to protect the full range of species present - not just plants, but also the animals that are traditionally associated with these habitats.



Great Burnet

This is why it was exciting to discover an area of neglected, rank grassland behind a factory in Telford. The site now belongs to Epson Telford Ltd., who bought it from the Telford Development Corporation. It was originally wet farmland, part of the Weald Moors, which formerly extended for many miles in the north-east of the county. TDC "improved" the area by constructing enormous drains and access roads, and the land is now high and dry (but not so dry that the occasional excavator cannot still sink into the deep peat that underlies the area).

The field at Epson is one of only two small areas of grassland in Shropshire that match the description of a flood meadow community. The other is a site known as Lord's Meadow near Albrighton (SJ80), which is mentioned in Leighton's *Flora* of 1841. Dr George Lloyd recorded Great Burnet there and Dr Henry Bidwell found Large Bitter-cress *Cardamine amara*. Much later B.R.Fowler recorded Great Burnet, Pale Sedge *Carex pallescens*, Heath Spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza maculata* and Adder's-tongue *Ophioglossum vulgatum* there for Sinker's *Flora*. In 1994 Daniel Wrench visited the site for English Nature, and confirmed that is is indeed a relict flood meadow, but in an area of agricultural improvement, and being of less interest than formerly.

The land at Hortonwood (SJ61) is therefore of particular significance in the county. It too is no more than a tiny remnant of the old flood meadows that must have existed, and is unlikely to have ever contained *Fritillaria meleagris*. It does, however, contain a whole range of other plants typical of species-rich grassland. One of the specialities of flood meadows in other parts of Britain are the dandelions *Taraxacum* spp., which may be worthy of further study at these two sites.

There may be other areas of grassland similar to these which await discovery. Great Burnet has formerly been recorded from below Corndon Hill and along the lower Severn valley from Buildwas to Bewdley. The Weald Moors, north of Telford, are also worthy of further exploration and were once famous for plants such as Common Meadow-rue *Thalictrum flavum*, Common bladderwort *Utricularia vulgaris*, Lesser water-plantain *Baldellia ranunculoides* and Various-leaved Pondweed *Potamogeton gramineus*. It is an uninviting area these days, with large arable fields everywhere, but events such as the conversion of farmland to industrial use can have unpredictable consequences, as in the conservation of the site at Hortonwood.

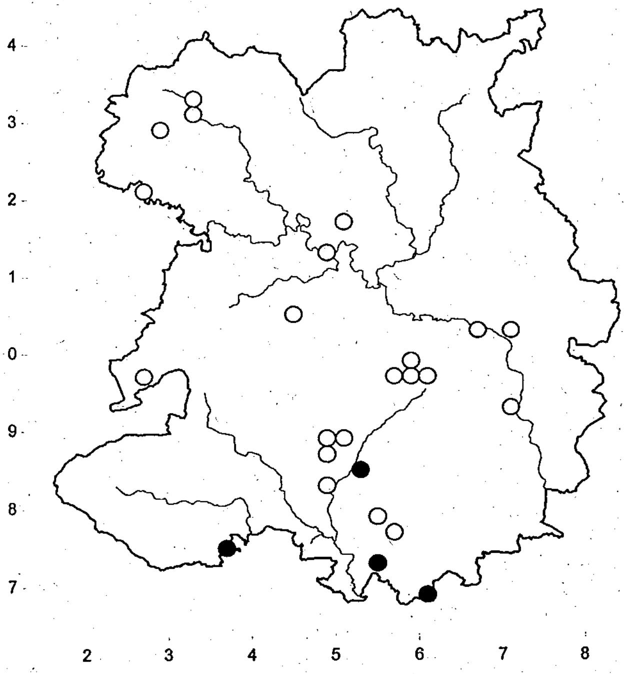
Epson Telford Ltd have recently entered their land into Countryside Stewardship and have agreed to set aside the best of their grassland for conservation. It is grazed each winter by sheep but, unfortunately, will never be flooded again. Educational visits are welcome, by appointment.

☐ Ref: Rodwell, J.S. (Ed) 1992. *British Plant Communities* Vol 3. *Grasslands and montane communities*. Cambridge University Press.

Sambucus ebulus L. Dwarf Elder or Danewort

Alex Lockton

Mark Lawley reports that this is still growing in 1996 at Peaton in Corvedale (SO58) where it was first recorded by the Rev. Edward Williams (1762 - 1833) early in the 19th century. It is a plant which requires some introduction in Shropshire these days. As the name suggests, it is a smaller relative of Elder *Sambucus nigra* with somewhat similar foliage and umbels of rich black (poisonous) berries in the autumn. Unlike its larger relative, it is herbaceous, dying down in the winter, but it is perennial and it spreads by underground rhizomes. Leighton (1841) mentions a field of several acres on Wenlock Edge that was "entirely covered with it".



Sambucus ebulus - Danewort

Distribution map showing the hectads - 10km squares - in which this species has been recorded in Shropshire. All records prior to 1985 are shown by open circles while current sites have black dots.

The various authorities are somewhat coy about the status of Danewort. Stace (1991) describes it as "possibly native to Britain" and it is "long established on limestones in S. England" according to the *Atlas of the British Flora*. Ian Trueman accepts it as a native in the *Flora of Montgomeryshire*, while Charles Sinker lists it as an introduction in the *Ecological Flora of the Shropshire Region*. Whatever the truth, it seems hardly likely to have been planted in most of the sites where it has been found in this county, generally along Wenlock Edge and in the Oswestry Hills, and it has indeed been recorded here for quite some time. The earliest known record is by Richard Waring (1718 - 1798), who wrote in 1770 of its presence "at Fern-hill, near Whittington and about Whittington Castle" (both in SJ33).

Whether native or not, it is certainly in decline. The map above shows all known records from within Shropshire with black dots for post-Flora records and open circles for those before 1985. There are several changes to the map in the *Ecological Flora*. Firstly, there is no dot in SJ63 - this appears to have been the outcome of a game of Chinese Whispers on Waring's record for Fernhill, as it passed through Turner & Dillwyn's *The Botanist's Guide through England & Wales* (1805) and then Leighton's *Flora* of 1841, where it is listed as "Ternhill, Whittington". This appears to have been interpreted by the authors of the *Ecological Flora* as two records: Tern Hill (SJ63) and Whittington (SJ33), thus creating a new dot 30km away from the original. The dot in SO27 is also omitted, being for a site just over the Radnorshire (VC43) border near Knucklas.

There have been several new records, bringing the number of current sites to four. This eliminates it from the category of "Rare in Shropshire" (3 sites or fewer), but it seems fair to allocate it the status of "Scarce in Shropshire" (10 sites or fewer), being at least a long-established alien, if not a true native. The current sites are:

☐ Peaton (SO58), where it was rediscovered by Mary Fuller and R. Ray in 1989.

☐ A field in SO37, from which there are records by Moira Williams (1980) and John Clayfield (1991).

☐ A roadside in SO66, with records by Winifred Hutton (1977) and John Bingham (1988).

☐ A site near Caynham in SO57. Audrey Ashwell, 1991.

All the old sites are listed below. In view of the relatively recent rediscovery of the site at Peaton - at least 160 years since Williams saw it there - there may be other populations still to be discovered, perhaps, in some of these old sites. If anyone wishes to look for it, we can possibly supply more information about the precise locations.

Site	**Hectad**	**Recorder**	**Date**
Presthope	SO59	Rev Edward Williams	<1833
Culmington	SO48	Rev Edward Williams	<1833
Bitterley	SO57	Rev Edward Williams	<1833
Upper Ledwyche	SO57	Rev Edward Williams	<1833
Lincoln Hill	SJ60	Francis Dickinson	<1841
Bridgnorth	SO79	Dr George Lloyd	<1841
Bitterley	SO57	Mary McGhie	<1841
Hughley	SO59	William Penny Brookes	<1841
Bourton	SO69	William Penny Brookes	<1841
Exfords Green	SJ40	Thomas Bodenham	<1841
Albright Hussey	SJ51	Dr T.W. Wilson	<1841
Llanymynech	SJ22	John Freeman Milward Dovaston	<1841
Burwood	SO48	William Leighton	<1841
The Quarry, Shrewsbury	SJ41	William Leighton	<1841
Presthope	SO59	George Potts	1925
Marrington	SO29	'Horwood'	1901
Oswestry	SJ22	Ellen Lloyd	1926
Middlehope	SO48	George Potts	1929
Wenlock Edge	SO59	Rev E.R. Sequeira & George Potts	1933
Hope Dale	SO58	Norah Mackenzie	1951
Hughley	SO59	Mrs M.C. Corrie	1951
Presthope	SO59	Edward Rutter	1954
Middlehope	SO48	Edward Rutter	1955
Hughley	SO59	Norah Mackenzie	1972
near Coalport	SJ70	Olive Hunter	1979

Sources & references

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☐ Hamilton, W P *et al.* 1913. Unpublished manuscript *Flora of Shropshire*. Formerly in possession of the Caradoc & Severn Valley Field Club. [Referred to in Sinker's *Flora*]

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☐ Stace, C.A. 1991. *New Flora of the British Isles.* Cambridge University Press.

☐ Trueman, I C, Morton, A & Wainwright, M. 1995. *The Flora of Montgomeryshire.* Montgomery Field Society & Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust, Welshpool.

☐ Turner, D & Dillwyn, L W. 1805. *The Botanist's Guide through England & Wales* (Shropshire: Vol 2, pp510-518). Phillips & Fardon, London. [Referred to in Leighton's *Flora*].

Publications

Alex Lockton

The second edition of *Rare Plants of Shropshire* is nearing completion. It is, in essence, a catalogue of the plants which are found in just three sites or fewer in the county. Species included are native to Britain and not deliberately introduced to the county, but the list includes some plants that clearly are more incidental than a part of the natural vegetation. As such, it should only be used by conservationists very carefully and it is a mistake to think of rare plants as necessarily more important than more common species.

Nevertheless it is a popular publication, and we have sold 200 copies of the first edition, published by Shrewsbury Museums Service in 1994. It is now time for a complete review, taking into account both new records and old ones that were not fully available to the authors of the *Shropshire Flora.*

The new publication, which should be ready in April or May, will include at least 34 new species, which are listed below for the convenience of those who already have a copy of the first edition. A number of other species have been deleted, usually because new records have shown them to be too common. An interesting exception is *Selaginella selaginoides*, which is being dropped because there appears to be insufficient information to support the claim that it was ever present in the county. The total number of changes is therefore more than 50 species, or one quarter of the total. We can make no apology for this - it was the very intention of the publication to elicit new records and gather more information, and we are very pleased and grateful to everyone who sent in new records. Please note that the lists below are not finalised.

1. Species to be added to the Rare Plants list.

Agrostemma githago
Astragalus danicus
Astrantia major
Bidens cernua var. *radiata*
Brachypodium pinnatum
Bromus x *pseudothominei*
Chenopodium ficifolium
Chenopodium urbicum
x *Dactylodenia legrandiana*
Deschampsia setacea
Diplotaxis tenuifolia
Drosera x *obovata*
Epipogium aphyllum
Equisetum hyemale
Equisetum x *font-queri*
Euphrasia anglica
Euphrasia arctica ssp. *borealis*
Euphrasia scottica
Euphrasia stricta
Fumaria officinalis ssp. *wirtgenii*
Fumaria x *painteri*
Lolium temulentum
Lycopodiella inundata
Oenanthe lachenalii
Papaver dubium ssp. *lecoqii*
Potamogeton x *zizii*
Ranunculus x *bachii*
Salvia pratensis
Schoenoplectus tabernaemontani
Sison amomum
Subularia aquatica
Thalictrum minus
Vaccinium x *intermedium*
Valerianella eriocarpa

2. Species to be deleted from the Rare Plants list.

Alisma lanceolatum
Anthemis arvensis
Arabis hirsuta
Calamagrostis canescens
Calamagrostis epigejos
Gagea lutea
Geranium sylvaticum
Eleogiton fluitans
Hypericum montanum
Lathyrus sylvestris
Pastinaca sativa
Pedicularis palustris
Ranunculus penicillatus
Selaginella selaginoides
Silene conica
Torilis nodosa
Trichophorum cespitosum
Trollius europaeus
Empetrum nigrum ssp. *nigrum*
Vaccinium vitis-idaea

Other publications

Co-ordinators may have noticed that the "R List" of uncommon plants recorded in the county has not been circulated for some time. This is because the old list is out of date. A new list, which will take the form of a full county checklist using Stace's nomenclature, is in preparation. Our apologies to anyone who is waiting for this - one reason for delay is that we hope to include critical taxa and bryophytes, to make it as widely useful as possible.

Please note that we have the following publications for sale:

☐ Volume 1 of *The Shropshire Naturalist.* 1992. £8 for 4 magazines (reduced from £11.80).
☐ The *Ecological Flora of the Shropshire Region* 1985. C.A.Sinker *et. al.* £12 (reduced from £18).
☐ The *Flora of Montgomeryshire.* 1995. Trueman, Morton & Wainwright. £18 + p&p.
☐ C.A.Sinker's *Lateral Key to Common Grasses.* FSC leaflet. £1.75.
☐ *Describing Wild Flowers.* FSC leaflet. £1.75

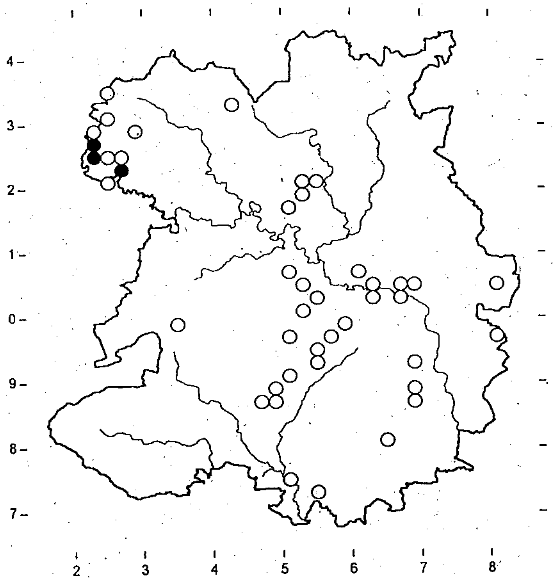
Coeloglossum viride (L.) Hartman - Frog Orchid

Ruth & Allan Dawes

As wardens of Craig Sychtyn SWT Nature Reserve, near Oswestry, we have been monitoring the number of Frog Orchids in the locality since 1990 (see table below). There have been some fluctuations in the number of flowering spikes, which may be natural in this somewhat erratic species, but we are concerned that the general trend is downwards, with a total of just four found in 1996.

Table 1: Number of flowering spikes in each of the three known populations at Craig Sychtyn Nature Reserve

Year	Site A	Site B	Site C
1991	10	-	-
1992	1	11	2
1993	3	10	1
1994	11	4	1
1995	5	-	2
1996	3	-	1



Above: the distribution of Frog Orchid *Coeloglossum viride* in Shropshire. Open circles are for records prior to 1985, while black dots represent the sites in which it has been recorded during the last few years.

The *Ecological Flora of the Shropshire Region* by Charles Sinker *et. al.* (1985) states that there is a "severe decrease" in this species and, since this publication, it has been lost from several more sites in the Oswestry uplands. Certainly there were many more sites in Shropshire in the 19th century when William Leighton published his Flora. Equally worrying, the *Flora of Montgomeryshire*, by Ian Trueman *et. al.* (1995) states that it is "mysteriously decreasing" and refers to the apparent loss of this species from Llanymynech Hill.

The Frog Orchid is generally found in short pasture on calcareous soils and often occurs in disused limestone quarries. It is found in both these habitats locally, but we have also seen it in the past growing in bare ground under a dense canopy in Yew (*Taxus baccata*) woodland - a colony that was lost through improvements to the Offa's Dyke Path.

Changing agricultural practices have resulted in the loss of many old pastures and their flora. Disused quarries soon become overgrown to the detriment of the Frog Orchid, which is a poor competitor with tall grasses. We are in danger of losing more of the few remaining sites in the county, as natural succession takes place in sites which are no longer managed in the traditional way.

We are keen to find out as much as we can about the ecology of the Frog Orchid in Shropshire and the reasons for its decline, and are appealing for information. We would like to visit any current or extinct site (details of which can be kept confidential if required) to record the habitat. The map above shows a dramatic decline over the years, and there are no records of this species occurring outside the Llanymynech area (SJ22) for many years, but old records exist for many parts of the county, and it would be interesting if it turned up anywhere.

Details of any sites/colonies, habitats, number of orchids, date seen or year of extinction and cause, if known, plus exact location would be very gratefully received. We hope to discover enough about the requirements of the Frog Orchid to enable us to protect the remaining sites and share our findings in a future article in the Flora Group Newsletter.

R.A. & A.P. Dawes, Rosedale, Chapel Lane, Trefonen, Oswestry, Shropshire, SY10 9DX. 01691 654245

References:

☐ Sinker, Packham, Trueman, Oswald, Perring & Prestwood. 1985. *Ecological Flora of the Shropshire Region.* Shropshire Nature Conservation Trust, Shrewsbury.

☐ Trueman, Morton & Wainwright. 1995. *The Flora of Montgomeryshire.* Montgomeryshire Field Society & The Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust.

Quick-reference guide to the rushes of Shropshire

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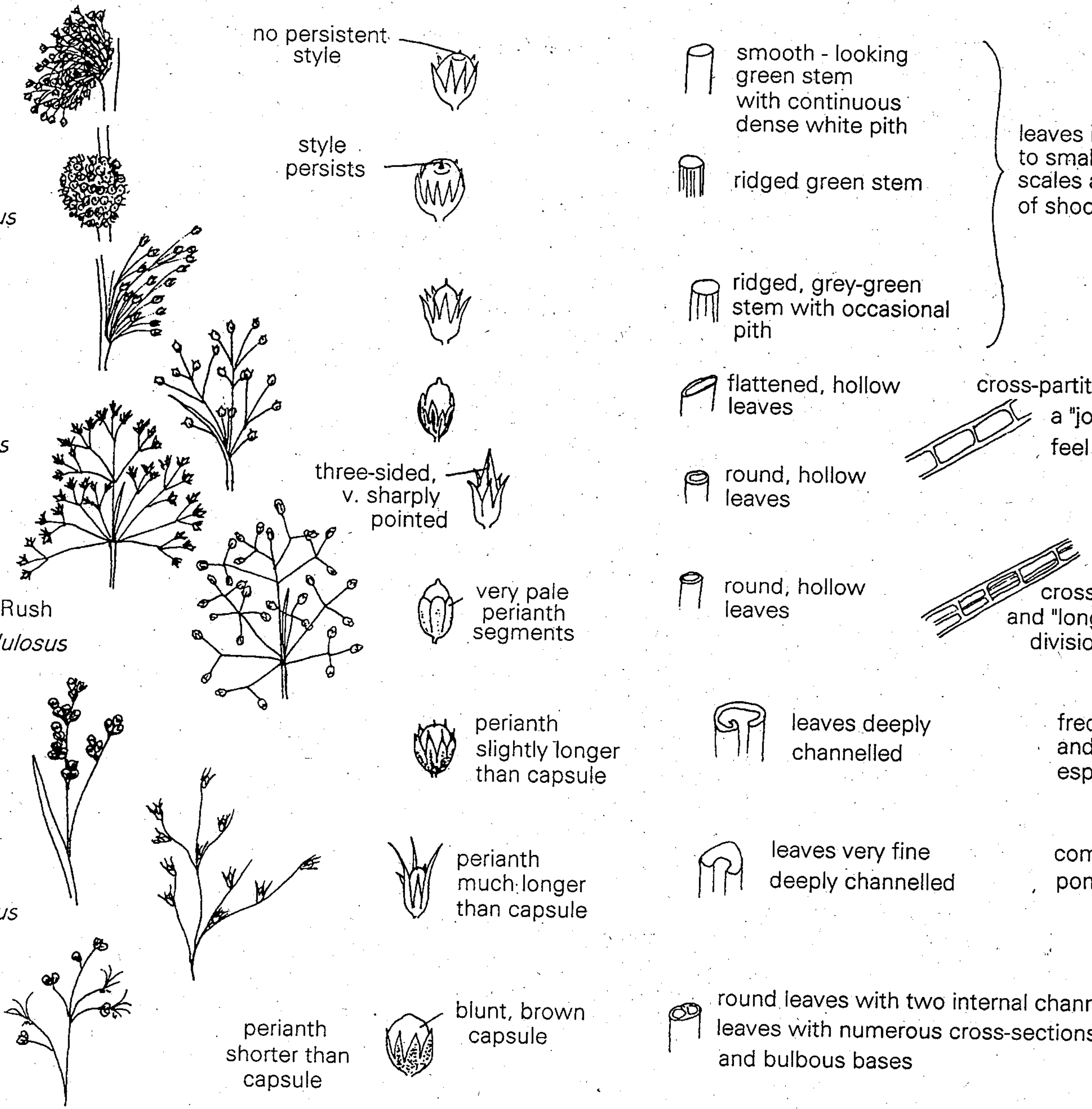

Soft Rush *Juncus effusus*	no persistent style	smooth - looking green stem with continuous dense white pith	leaves reduced to small brown scales at base of shoot.		very common in damp fields
Compact Rush *Juncus conglomeratus*	style persists	ridged green stem			common on more acid soils
Hard Rush *Juncus inflexus*		ridged, grey-green stem with occasional pith			common on more base rich soils
Jointed Rush *Juncus articulatus*		flattened, hollow leaves		cross-partitions give a "jointed" feel	common in marshes, grassland & fens
Sharp-flowered Rush *Juncus acutiflorus*	three-sided, v. sharply pointed	round, hollow leaves			frequent in acidic marshes & grassland
Blunt-flowered Rush *Juncus subnodulosus*	very pale perianth segments	round, hollow leaves		cross-partitions and "longitudinal" divisions	rare, on calcareous peat and fen-land
Heath Rush *Juncus squarrosus*	perianth slightly longer than capsule	leaves deeply channelled			frequent on wet heathland and moorland, especially along tracks
Toad Rush *Juncus bufonius*	perianth much longer than capsule	leaves very fine deeply channelled			common on bare soil around ponds and disturbed areas
Bulbous Rush *Juncus bulbosus*	perianth shorter than capsule blunt, brown capsule	round leaves with two internal channels. leaves with numerous cross-sections and bulbous bases			occasional on wet heaths and boggy pools on acid soils.

Botanical Identification Courses 1997

The following courses may be of interest to members of the Flora Group who wish to improve their identification skills in a particular area of botany. Anyone interested in attending these courses can contact Sarah Whild (01743 343789) or the following organisations for their full brochures:
Birmingham University School of Continuing Studies: 0121 414 3413
Preston Montford Field Centre: 01743 850380
The Gateway Education & Arts Centre, Shrewsbury: 01743 355137
Green Wood Trust: 01952 432769

Date	Title of Course	Organiser	Tutor	Cost
Apr 19 - 20	Assessing Woodlands for Conservation	Green Wood Trust	Sarah Whild	£100
Apr 27	Woodland Wild Flowers	The Gateway	Sarah Whild	£10
May 16 - 18	Naturalist in Shropshire	Preston Montford FC	Sarah Whild	£99
May 26 - 30	Simply Flowers	Preston Montford FC	Goronwy Wynne	£190
Jun 10	Identifying Grasses	Sarah Whild	Sarah Whild	£12
Jun 13 - 15	Yellow Composites	Preston Montford FC	Franklyn Perring	£99
Jun 13 - 18	Identifying Wild Flowers	Preston Montford FC	Sarah Whild	£220
Jun 20 - 22	Wild Flower History of Shropshire	Birmingham University	Sarah Whild	£137
Jun 20 - 22	Wild Flowers of the Borderlands	Preston Montford FC	Colin Small	£99
Jun 20 - 22	Tree Identification	Preston Montford FC	Les Harvey	£99
Jul 4 - 11	Biological Recording	Preston Montford FC	Sarah Whild & Alex Lockton	£266
Jul 11 - 13	Getting to grips with grasses	Preston Montford FC	Adrian Bayley	£110
Jul 14 - 18	An Introduction to NVC	Preston Montford FC	Adrian Bayley	£210
Jul 18 - 20	Water Plants	Preston Montford FC	Colin Small	£99
Jul 22	Ferns and Horsetails	South Shropshire	Sarah Whild	£12
Aug 1 - 8	Mosses and Liverworts	Preston Montford FC	Martha Newton	£266
Aug 22 - 24	A Naturalist in Shropshire	Preston Montford FC	Sarah Whild	£99
Aug 29 - 31	Ferns	Preston Montford FC	Liz Blackman	£99

'A Bit on the Side'
- Roadside Verges in Shropshire

by Liz Radford, Shropshire County Council

As many of you are aware, roadside verges can provide a considerable contribution to the conservation of flower-rich grassland. A number of traditional meadow species find refuge in the relatively undisturbed habitat of the verge when pushed out of neighbouring farmland by intensification processes.

Shropshire's verges do contain some jewels as far as nature conservation is concerned, for example spreading bellflower (*Campanula patula*), yellow star-of-Bethlehem (*Gagea lutea*) and saw-wort (*Serratula tinctoria*). It is vital that sites supporting such plants are managed appropriately to ensure their survival.

Those of you who were at the December Flora Group meeting will know that Shropshire County Council is currently undertaking an audit of roadside verges as part of the response to the Biodiversity Challenge and UK Biodiversity Action Plan. This interest in roadside verges has been welcomed by many people and some of the Flora recorders have already been very helpful in suggesting some special verge sites in the county. This article is really just a reminder to those of you who were already aware of the project and an introduction to those who aren't. If any readers have ideas of, or information on verge sites of potentially high diversity that would benefit from a raised profile with the highways authority to prevent them being damaged and species being lost, the Environment Department would very much like to hear from you. We are not only concerned with verges containing threatened species but also those that are of general wildlife interest, for example displays of common (but none the less beautiful) wild flowers, verges that contain important food plants for insects, verges that are known to support certain bird species or those that provide a good example of a particular habitat.

We look forward to hearing from you about any verges that you think are worthy of special attention.

Liz Radford

Future contacts for this roadside verge initiative are Rob Pinsent or John Hughes, Natural and Historic Environment Team, The Environment Department, Shirehall, Shrewsbury SY2 6ND. 01743 252555

The Shropshire Flora Group

The Flora Group is an association of professional and amateur botanists concerned with the survey and monitoring of the higher plants and vegetation of the county. The Group is associated with the Shropshire Wildlife Trust (SWT) and the Botanical Society of the British Isles (BSBI).

Prof. Ian Trueman is the BSBI Vice-county Recorder for Shropshire (VC40).
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John Bingham	SO77
Joan Brown	SO79
Julie Clarke	SJ63 & SJ64
John Clayfield	SO37
Ruth Dawes	SJ22
Anne Dyer	SO48
Audrey Franks	SJ63 & SJ64
Jean Hooson	SJ53 & SJ54
Dr H.V.Hughes	SJ80
Jane Ing	SJ32
Sylvia Kingsbury	SO38 & SO39
Alex Lockton	SJ41
Tavia McLean	SJ71
Pat Parker	SJ42 & SJ43
Franklyn Perring	SJ73
Will Prestwood	SJ50
Jean Rapson	SJ61
Elizabeth Roberts	SJ23
Ian Trueman	SJ70
Chris Walker	SJ40
Sarah Whild	SJ51

Anyone interested in receiving the Flora Group newsletter or taking part in our programme of events is welcome to join as a recording member (free) or as a subscriber (£5 p.a. or £10 for 3 years). Please contact Sarah Whild for details.

The Flora Group offers a (free) record centre service to contributing organisations and individuals, drawing on our unique database of the county's flora & fauna. Contact Alex Lockton for further information.